

Masthead Logo

**The Palimpsest**

Volume 13 | Number 11

Article 5

11-1-1932

# Comment

John Ely Briggs

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.uiowa.edu/palimpsest>

Part of the [United States History Commons](#)

## Recommended Citation

Briggs, John E. "Comment." *The Palimpsest* 13 (1932), 470-472.  
Available at: <https://ir.uiowa.edu/palimpsest/vol13/iss11/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the State Historical Society of Iowa at Iowa Research Online. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Palimpsest by an authorized administrator of Iowa Research Online. For more information, please contact [lib-ir@uiowa.edu](mailto:lib-ir@uiowa.edu).

## Comment by the Editor

### *THE PRESSURE OF TIME*

Weight is the expression of force, and force is the cause of action. An apple falls. Power applied to mass produces change. The pressure of earth upon vegetable matter created coal. If the old paradox of the irresistible force and the immovable object must be solved, the answer is reaction. There is no motion without cause.

Perhaps the use of human energy is also the result of force. People respond to innumerable influences associated with instinct, desire, or environment. Whatever they do is involuntary — caused by conditions beyond their control. Such elemental compulsion as hunger and cold may supply the motive power of action, or the stimuli to move may be less tangible than food and shelter. Love and pride, sea and land, day and night — all determine human conduct.

The burden of time may be as effective as any specific reagent. Men delve and build and study and explain, and yet they never seem to finish. Always there is work ahead when the allotted time is up. Eventually a project is completed, but whoever began it may not live to see it done. Life



is without end, but not for any one: there is time enough, but not for you and me. "Give me only one more year, or day, or hour!" is the cry of mental anguish wrung from a hurried mortal by the pressure of time. Upon the industrious no less than the indolent, that inexorable force weighs heavily. It is the proof that inertia is natural, that action is essentially involuntary.

Nor does leisure provide an avenue of escape from the exigencies of time. Though the exertion of definite accomplishment may be avoided, the substitution of perpetual inconclusion is equally oppressive. A surplus of time may be as burdensome as overwork. It stimulates the mind. From random thoughts, ideas emerge; the hazy outlines of a reasoned plan appear; and then begins an endless task to make illusive concepts fit a pattern of philosophy. If the form of thought conforms in structural curvature to space, the mind proceeds upon concentric orbits, infinite in size and number — forever starting out and always coming back, over and over, interminably, ever striving and never attaining. There is no finality in circles.

No wonder that solitary confinement is the cruelest of punishments. Men who have such leisure thrust upon them find that the pressure of time intensifies their thinking to the limit of endur-



ance. Permanent contemplation may exhaust their sanity. But if their solitude were modified, imprisonment might be productive of original ideas. Some of the literary masterpieces of the world were written in jail. Confederate prisons seem to have made a poet of Major Byers. How much of every man's life is conditioned by opportunity in terms of time.

J. E. B.